

ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

EDITED BY WILLIAM E DAVIS, JR.

AVIAN BIOCHEMISTRY AND MOLECULAR BIOLOGY. By Lewis Stevens. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, U.K. 1996:272 pp. \$50.00 (cloth).—A synopsis on the first page of this book says it is “. . . the only comprehensive and up-to-date survey of avian biochemistry and molecular biology available.” The author has written a clear and concise coverage of this area. The text covers such aspects as protein and amino acid metabolism, nutrition, lipids, carbohydrates, avian hormones, and metabolic adaptation. Part 2 of the book is devoted to “the avian genome and its expression” and summarizes this material not available elsewhere.

The text is nicely organized and cleanly presented. The figures are nicely done and relevant to the account. There were few, if any, typographical errors. The references are fairly thorough and up-to-date, although I suspect United States authors are a bit under-represented in the review. I was impressed that the author appreciated correct nomenclature and taxonomy and made an effort to use it in a book that essentially is about molecular biology. It frustrates me to see manuscripts about birds written by people who are not sufficiently informed to recognize appropriate nomenclature.

This text is well worth the money for those interested in the cellular-molecular level of ornithology.—C. R. BLEM.

ORIOLES, BLACKBIRDS, AND THEIR KIN: A NATURAL HISTORY. By Alexander F. Skutch. Illus. by Dana Gardner. The University of Arizona Press, Tucson, Arizona. 1996:291 pp. \$50.00 (cloth), \$21.95 (paper).—Who says there are no more heroes to emulate? Mine easily could be Alexander F. Skutch. At time when study of whole organisms is considered passé by some, Dr. Skutch has produced a masterful account of the natural history of a very important group—the blackbirds (and after his 90th birthday!). This book, his twenty-sixth, guides us to through a detailed, but never boring, account of how the orioles, blackbirds, and their kin go through their lives. Some accounts were taken, “with slight modifications” from Skutch’s *Life histories of Central American birds*, published in 1954 by The Cooper Ornithological Society, and from a few other miscellaneous published sources. The material has been updated with references cited from the scientific literature through 1994, and new accounts were added.

Skutch writes clearly, cleanly, and with a lot of content. To my taste he adds just enough anthropomorphism to be interesting, but not unscientific. The book includes historical vignettes, personal asides, and insightful comments—all done in an economical, interesting manner. The sections on cowbirds alone are worth the price of the book. Beginning birders will enjoy the book and learn a great deal of fundamental ornithology. Advanced students will find much useful information and introduction to specific references. The reference section is not (nor was it intended to be) a comprehensive coverage of the blackbirds and their kin.

Gardner’s black-and-white sketches are excellent, the binding and covers attractive, and the book is well worth the money (particularly the paperback version). All-in-all this is a wonderful book. It stands as an example of the way in which bird books of this genre should be done.—C. R. BLEM.